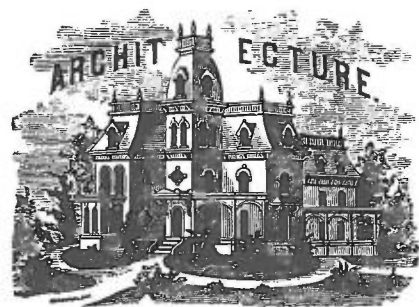


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Charles Q. Clapp
1799-1868

When Charles Quincy Clapp died in 1868, Portland newspapers lauded his contributions to the city, noting that "his natural inclination led him... to engage in improving his real estate. Possessing an unusual taste for architecture, in which he was excelled by few, every building erected under his auspices was designed and modelled by himself...". The papers went on to claim that "he has erected, probably a greater number of buildings on his own account than any other person."¹ Were it not for these statements, we might be at a loss to know to whom to credit the designs of some of the city's most interesting nineteenth century architecture.

Good substantiation for Clapp's architectural interest exists, however. In 1831 he spoke before the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association, giving historical data on classical orders as well as practical advice. A few years later he donated eight architectural books to that organization's apprentice library, indicating that he had

purchased and read widely. Moreover, the writer John Neal, who was Clapp's contemporary, credited him with the remodelling of civic and religious structures in Portland.² There is no reason to doubt that he applied his knowledge to designing the many buildings he erected.

Charles Quincy Clapp was born in Portland in May of 1799, the son of Asa and Elizabeth Wendell Quincy Clapp. Asa Clapp's story is one for a novelist. Orphaned as a boy, he took part in the Revolution at the age of sixteen, serving on a privateer. Subsequently, he made a small fortune in the West Indian trade, enough to enable him to marry a daughter of the Boston Quincys and to establish himself as a substantial trader in Portland. Soon he was the wealthiest man in the town; later, in the state. Active in politics as well as business, he entertained Presidents Madison and Polk in his impressive Congress Street home.³

In contrast, the son's life seems prosaic. It is not known where he received his education, said to be both "liberal and commercial"⁴ He probably attended Portland Academy, though like his younger brother, Asa William Henry Clapp, he could have gone away to school.⁵ Charles Clapp was married young to Julia, the daughter of General Joshua Wingate of Portland. The couple moved into the former Hugh McLellan House at Spring and High Streets, then owned by Asa Clapp, and except for five years in the 1830's, lived in it thereafter. If we knew more about Charles Clapp's education, we might know where he developed his penchant for architecture. Probably he taught himself by reading books like the architectural manuals which he gave to the Mechanic's library.⁶

Clapp was in his early teens during the War of 1812 and may have longed to emulate his father's teen-age exploits. At nineteen he was commissioned a lieutenant in the local militia; and even without actual war service, he rose in rank, to be referred to as "Col. Clapp" by 1831. Actually, he was still a lieutenant colonel in 1833; but the shorter military title was employed throughout his life, perhaps to distinguish him from his brother.⁷

All three Clapps were active in politics. The elder Asa had been a Jeffersonian, to the extent of supporting the Embargo which had permitted the grass to grow on local wharves while bankrupting many of his competitors. Later, even though he was the state's largest shareholder in the Bank of the United States, he was

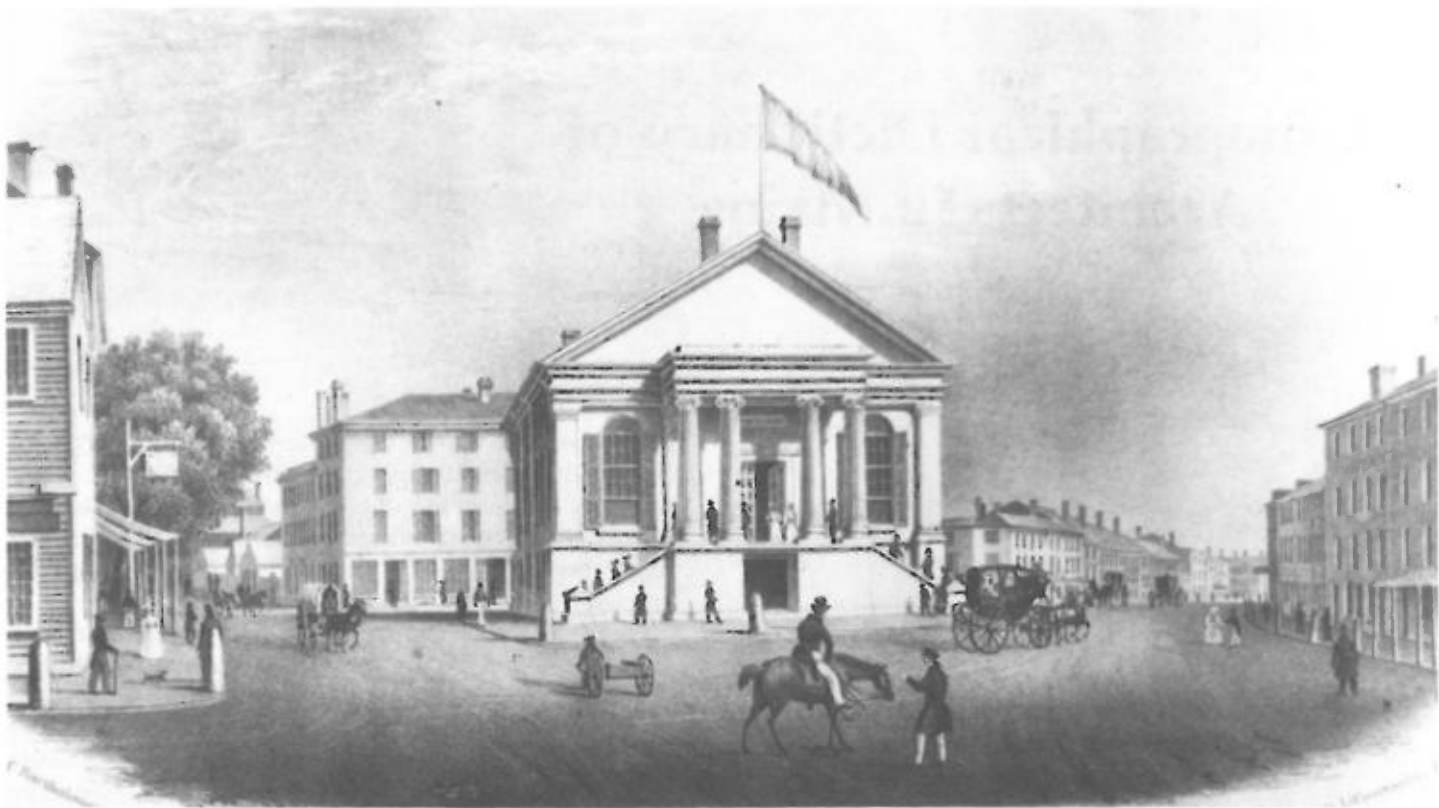


Figure 1. Market Square, Portland, showing the City Hall, center, with the Cumberland House behind it, 1838 view (MHPC).

a Jacksonian Democrat, as was Charles. It was the latter who invited Andrew Jackson, touring the northern states on his "Grand Triumphal Tour" after the 1832 election, to visit Portland. Jackson's Massachusetts host was a Quincy relative. Unfortunately for local Democrats and for Clapp prestige, Jackson became ill in New Hampshire and returned to Washington without touching Maine.⁸

At that time, Clapp was an aide to the Governor. He served briefly as Portland's representative to the state legislature in 1832-33, but later contented himself with party activity which did not include office-holding. His "fiery" and "impetuous" nature may not have been appropriate for a politician.⁹ Perhaps he preferred to remain full-time in Portland, close to his varied undertakings.

In the role of real estate developer, Clapp had found an admirable blend of avocation with vocation, and also a way to help both his fortune and his city grow. In residential areas, he built houses; in the commercial district, stores and hotels. Frequently he worked in partnership with others, often including his brother. He took part in more grandiose enterprises as well. In 1850 Clapp and eight others undertook to develop part of Back Cove, proposing to construct a bridge with a dam and locks at the entrance, to excavate a basin, and to fit it with wharves. It was hoped that there might also be a harnessing of tidal power at the dam site.¹⁰ Although the plan was not completed, about eleven acres of Back Cove did get filled in, producing both residential and commercial land popularly referred to

as "Clapp's Dump".¹¹ Clapp was also actively involved with bringing railroads to Portland, and one station was located on the new ground.¹² A newspaper comment regarding one Clapp proposal for a hotel near the station indicates local views of the family: "It is such men who give business to the city. They do more than talk."¹³

Among the hotels with which Clapp is credited was the Portland Exchange Coffee House. The contract between the proprietors and the master carpenter survives. It describes a brick structure four stories high on Fore Street but only three stories at the Market Street entrance. Two shops opened onto Market Street, four onto Fore. On the latter street was also the entrance to the hotel bar. Upper floors contained hotel rooms. Clapp's role as designer seems clear, since most details were to be subject to his approval alone. The contract throws some light on business practices of the day. The owners were to be paid monies equal to the rents of the stores and of the hotel itself if these were not completed within given periods after the masons had erected the walls.¹⁴

The Coffee House opened on January 1, 1829, with a "very liberal collation" for assembled guests. The *Eastern Argus* reported that "not a murmur of dissatisfaction" was heard concerning the structure. A drawing in the same newspaper showed a large building, given distinction by a clerestory for the fourth-floor windows. The only other decorative details were dentilled cornices and a small columned portico on Fore Street.¹⁵

In 1836 Charles and Asa Clapp were among the incorporators of the Cumberland House, a hostelry



Figure 2. Clapp House, Spring Street, Portland, c. 1900 view (MHPC).

formed from several older buildings at Congress and Federal Streets. The new corporation redesigned the buildings, making "a hotel—not a tavern—a respectable and rather attractive establishment; adding the portico..., enlarging the rooms; and converting the ground floor into small shops." Later renamed the United States Hotel, it stood, with various alterations, until 1965.¹⁶

The portico on the Portland Exchange Coffee House had a Greek Revival appearance, and the entrance to the Cumberland House was even more clearly in that mode. Between working on the two, Clapp had experimented further with classical styles. One example was his 1832 redesigning of City Hall, built by John Kimball, Jr., as a market house and town hall in 1825 (Figure 1). This late Federal style building was still adequate for municipal needs; but Portland had just become Maine's first city, and something more up-to-date seemed in order. Clapp offered his services. He had the cupola removed and heavier entablatures arranged to form a pediment at the gables. A monumental portico was added to one gable end at the second-floor level, reached by curving exterior stairs. Viewers agreed that the new facade was most elegant, but the city council found Clapp to have spent much more than was expected and debated long and bitterly before voting to pay the bills.¹⁷ John Neal was also unimpressed. His sense of propriety was offended by columns with Ionic capitals, but poor proportions, "the pillars being only six or seven diameters (in height) instead of eight or nine, and the entablature altogether heavy enough for the Roman Doric." Neal was not fond of Doric heaviness, so he

also spoke with distaste of the portico of the High Street Church of 1831, with which, he said, Clapp "had something to do."¹⁸

In 1832 Charles Q. Clapp built a two story brick house for himself on Spring Street (Figure 2). Unlike any residence which Portland had seen before, this classical temple house was more Roman than Greek, in that it sat on a raised platform-cellar and was in the Ionic style, which the Romans favored. Also Roman in inspiration were the carved urns on acroteria (platforms) above the front gable. The floor plan was more original than either Roman or Greek. Clapp extended one room on each floor forward to the front plane, using pilasters on the corners to correspond with front columns, while placing columns along indented porches on either side of the extension. The graceful proportions of these columns and the entablature must have pleased even Neal. First floor windows were floor length. Steps led up to both porches from the street, but only the left side provided entry. Its door lacked the sidelights common to the period, but carved acanthus motifs separating the upper and lower panels and a decorative transom light above made it impressive (Figure 3).

The entry hall featured a curving staircase, each step-end graced by a Greek key. Next to it and connected by a double doorway to the front parlor was a central circular room, lighted by a skylight which was located above the center of a second-floor domed ceiling over an opening between the floors. Two rooms, one for dining, were at the back, and a smaller one balanced the front entry. The kitchen was in the cellar.

In the main rooms, dark marble fireplaces were



Figure 3. Doorway, Clapp House, c. 1900 view (Courtesy of Mrs. Willard Warren).

simple in design, but the woodwork provided contrast. In the parlor all openings had floral-carved corner blocks, while the wider doors were topped by tablets carved in an unusual shell-and-scroll motif. Leafy scrolls combined with anthemions were accepted as classical designs, but shells were less often used. One did appear in a volume by the Italian Andrea Palladio, with which Clapp may have been familiar. A more likely source was William Pocock's *Finishings for Rooms*, an English book which Clapp donated to the Mechanic's library. Pocock also included a swirled acanthus design similar to those on the front door and in the parlor ceiling.

The Clapps lived in their new house only a few years. In 1837 they sold it, and the family returned to the larger house next door to provide company for Mrs. Clapp's widowed mother. They did not move again.¹⁹

When addressing the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association, Clapp had insisted "that though every mechanic could not have a splendid mansion, he might at least have a neat one."²⁰ During the two decades after building his own "mansion", he adapted his ideas to smaller residences, giving each character without the cost of splendor.

To a small wooden duplex built at the corner of Salem and Brackett Streets in 1836-37, he applied some of the



Figure 4. Clapp Double House, Brackett and Salem Streets, Portland, 1988 view (MHPC).

features used on his temple house, including corbelled Ionic architraves and cellar kitchens (Figure 4). The larger house had recesses in the brick by the front window for exterior shutters. On the duplex were niches in the brick of the high cellar walls and in wood on the main floor, where windows and shutters together were framed with molding and topped with a flat central tablet. Recessed and sidelighted doorways were on opposite sides of the building, with crossets trimming the outer edges of each opening.

A block of three row houses erected on Park Street in 1846 was more substantial, if less innovative. Under a common low hip roof, the three-bay facades were relieved only by the granite of lintels and foundation. Today only the Greek peaks over recessed doorways testify to their Greek Revival origins, but originally period motifs cast into iron railings along the sidewalk provided contrast for the stark brick facades.

More suited to shelter "mechanics" was Park Place, a series of ten smaller row homes built in 1848 on their own court opening off Park Street nearer the harbor. The facade offered both variety and repetition, as the eight interior buildings were built alike: two bays wide, three stories high, with wooden entries at the front and a recessed panel at the roof parapet, while each end unit was three bays in width. The larger units had wider Greek Revival doorways, one flush and one recessed. Above all front windows were decorative iron pieces cast with anthemion and scroll motifs. Front windows were casement rather than the usual sash, with panes shaped to form an arch at the top. Each was shorter than the brick opening for which it was intended, the lower space being filled in by a simple wooden panel. Rear windows, however, were sash and of normal length; but the openings had slight arches, necessitating wooden fillers above the rectangular windows. Since the houses were advertised as seven-room units and since each had three chambers at the third level, the present kitchen ells were not original. The buildings were all constructed to be heated by stoves, not fireplaces, though they had decorative mantels, some of marble.

On Danforth Street, directly in front of the Park Place row and built at about the same time, was a large brick duplex which also had window openings larger than the windows themselves. Here, however, sash windows were employed. The larger units and the on-street location marked these as more expensive homes, as did details such as the more stylishly heavy eaves and carved brackets at the doorways.

A block up Park Street from these buildings was the mansion of Charles Clapp's daughter Julia and her husband, John Carroll. Clapp gave Julia the property in 1851 and is assumed to have designed the brick house, which, in keeping with changing styles, was Italianate in its external details. Large wooden brackets supported the wide overhang of the eaves, and stone lintels above the windows protruded over smaller brackets of stone. As in Park Place, the parlors had casement windows, but these reached the floor. Like Clapp's earlier temple house, his daughter's residence featured an opening above the central hallway and under a skylight. Bay windows on the front and an oriel at the rear provided the variety typical of the period. Interior details reflected a transitional era, with heavy Greek Revival woodwork next to ornate Italianate arched marble mantels in the parlor. Particularly unusual and demanding of imaginative planning was construction involving an ell somewhat lower than the main section, which was so built that the rooms in the northwest corner were even with those in the ell, making possible a third-level room in that location only.²¹

As many differences existed among Clapp's commercial structures as among his residences. The Upper Hay Building of 1826 is his earliest known work (Figure 5). Designed to make use of a narrow triangle of property at the juncture of Free and Congress Streets, it was



Figure 5. Clapp Block, Congress and Free Streets, Portland, 1865 view (MHPC).

originally two stories in height. Its most outstanding detail is the row of handsome arched windows on its Congress Street facade.

Other early stores have disappeared, among them the fourteen buildings which Clapp lost to the Great Fire of July 4, 1866. No longer young or in good health, he undertook to replace most of them. By October 13th, he had eleven brick buildings under construction, with five already roofed in and the other six built at least up to their second stories.²² Although erected at the same time, Clapp's later buildings are not all alike. At 373-375 Fore Street are two noteworthy small commercial facades whose oversized second-story windows represent the only known examples of Clapp's use of Gothic motifs. The storefronts, with quoins at the edges of the facades and a bracketted overhang at the top, are eclectic in style; particularly as the pointed arches of the window openings are set within circular arches, and carved motifs just beneath each arch also differ from Gothic designs.

Indeed, though the details are not alike, this trim has much in common with that at 103-107 Exchange Street, a building indisputedly Italianate in its features (Figure 6). Sited at Exchange, Federal and Market Streets, its rounded corner was once echoed in a duplicate building across Exchange Street. The first floor has been remodelled, but on the second level are attractive arched windows accentuated by drip moldings set about the width of a brick from the openings. Carved circular motifs above these fill in the openings in the brick. Further decoration comes from an entablature of molded brick, from heavy brackets at each end of the straight street facades, and from two dormers per side, each with segmental pediments.

Clapp's other 1866 buildings are more straightforwardly Italianate. Some occupy the site of the Coffee Exchange, three stores on Fore Street, a smaller two-story structure on Market Street, and one built for son-in-law John Carroll next to it. A narrow building built for A.W. H. Clapp on Middle Street is also Italianate, enlarged in more recent years by the addition of another story.

Charles Q. Clapp has often been called a "gentleman architect". Whether that term can properly be applied to an astute businessman who used his architectural skills to improve his commercial property is moot. Nevertheless, his social standing in the community was not debated, and his buildings illustrated both ingenuity in use of space and quality and variety in detail. Clearly he was both an architect and a gentleman.

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NOTES

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- ² *Eastern Argus*, February 2, 1831; March 30, 1838. John Neal, *Portland Illustrated*, Portland, 1874, pp. 27, 76.
- ³ Lewis C. Hatch, *Maine: A History: Biographies*, New York, 1919, p. 127.
- ⁴ *Eastern Argus*, March 4, 1868.
- ⁵ Hatch, *op. cit.* Norwich Academy, which Asa W. H. Clapp attended, did not open until 1819. It says something of general values that the two Asas, both active in politics and business, were discussed in a volume of Maine biographies, while Charles, the architect, was not.
- ⁶ These books included titles on ecclesiastical and Gothic architecture, one of Inigo Jones' designs, *Shaw on Masonry*, *Pocock's Finishing for Rooms*, and three volumes of the *Builder's Assistant*. Card of thanks, *Eastern Argus*, March 30, 1838.
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- ⁸ Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845*, New York, 1984, pp. 75-82. *Christian Intelligencer*, June 26, 1833; July 5, 1833.
- ⁹ James Phinney Baxter, "Reminiscences of a Great Enterprise", *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, Portland, 1890, p. 5. *Eastern Argus*, March 23, 1852; March 4, 1868.
- ¹⁰ Their petition to the state legislature appeared in the *Portland Advertiser*, June 27, 1850.
- ¹¹ William Willis, *History of Portland*, Portland, 1865, p. 583. *Eastern Argus*, March 4, 1868. The term "Clapp's Dump" was popularly used into the early 20th century, when individuals living to-day recall hearing it.
- ¹² Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 583. Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- ¹³ *Eastern Argus*, October 28, 1852.
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- ¹⁵ *Eastern Argus*, February 6, 1829.
- ¹⁶ Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 76. *Private and Special Laws of the State of Maine, 1835-1839*, Augusta, 1842, pp. 422-423.
- ¹⁷ William Goold, "Old Houses and Their Builders", *Portland Transcript*, August 8, 1892.
- ¹⁸ Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- ¹⁹ Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, Portland, Vol. 155, p. 460. Portland city directories, 1827-67.
- ²⁰ *Eastern Argus*, February 2, 1831. This was more than a decade before popularizers like Andrew Jackson Downing and Orson Squire Fowler took up the issue.
- ²¹ For background, see Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., "Carroll Mansion of Unusual Style", *Portland Evening Express*, July 20, 1966. Plans for a 1918 remodelling designed by the Portland architect John P. Thomas are in the collection of the Maine Historical Society.
- ²² *Portland Transcript*, October 13, 1866.



Figure 6. Clapp Block, Exchange Street, Portland, 1965 view (MHPC).

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY CHARLES Q. CLAPP

All Commissions are located in Portland.

Hugh and Stephen McLellan Houses, High Street, First Story
Facade Windows Lengthened, c. 1821-27, Extant.
Clapp Block, Congress and Free Streets, 1826, Altered.
Portland Exchange Coffee House, Fore and Market Streets, 1828,
Destroyed.
High Street Church, 1831, Destroyed.
City Hall, Market Square, Remodelled from 1825 Market House,
1832, Destroyed.
Clapp House, 97 Spring Street, 1832, Extant.
Cumberland House, Market Square, 1834-35, Destroyed.
Clapp Double House, Brackett and Salem Streets, 1837-38, Extant.
Clapp Block, 137 Park Street, 1846, Extant.
Clapp-Gordon Double House, 126-128 Danforth Street, 1847-49,
Extant.
Park Place Row, Park Place, 1848, Extant.
Julia Clapp Carroll House, 79 Park Street, Portland, 1851, Altered.
Clapp Block, near Exchange and Federal Streets, 1851, Destroyed.
Clapp Block, Middle Street, 1851, Destroyed.
Robert Boyd House, 87 High Street, Remodelling, c. 1855-62,
Extant.
Clapp Block, 103-107 Exchange Street, 1866, Altered.
Clapp-Waterhouse Block, 367-371 Fore Street, 1866, Extant.
Clapp Block, 373-375 Fore Street, 1866, Extant.
Clapp Block, 30-32 Market Street, 1866, Altered.
Carroll Block, 34-36 Market Street, 1866, Extant.
A. W. H. Clapp Block, 189-191 Middle Street, 1866, Altered.
Clapp Block, Middle and Union Streets, 1866-67, Destroyed.

Photograph of Charles Q. Clapp
Courtesy of Maine Historical Society

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